

Feminist digital citizenship in Nigeria

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Introduction

This chapter examines the dynamics of feminist digital citizenship in Nigeria. It addresses the problem of closing offline civic space in Nigeria by examining two recent cases in which digital citizenship was used to open new online civic space: the Bring Back Our Girls campaign (#BBOG) for the release of the kidnapped schoolgirls from Chibok and the anti-police violence campaign #ENDSARS both of which went viral globally. The two campaigns are used as emblematic case studies illustrative of a wider increase in feminist digital citizenship in Nigeria. Acknowledging the gendered inequality of digital access and use, the two cases are analysed using a framework that combines cyberfeminism with the five 'A's of technology access.

Nigeria is a country characterized by political tensions, insecurities, riots, violent protests and police responses (Human Rights Watch 2021). It has become increasingly difficult for citizens to safely exercise their rights to free speech, freedom of expression and opinion (CIVICUS 2019; Freedom House 2019). Persons criticizing the president or taking part in street demonstrations regularly experience police violence, arrest and/or incarceration (Oladapo and Ojebode 2021). Denied the space for peaceful civic engagement offline, Nigerians increasingly use social media to engage in digital citizenship online. As the use of digital tools increases in the country, digital space has become a site for civic engagement, allowing people to speak up against injustice (Uwalaka and Watkins 2018). Campaigners sought the release of kidnapped girls, the arrest of activists, justice for those affected and wider systemic change within government and law enforcement in Nigeria (Vanguard 2020).

Both the #BBOG and #ENDSARS protests involved heavy use of social media by tech-savvy young people, and women played a key leadership role in both campaigns (Olugbemi 2011). Women's contribution to the civic movement for change in Nigeria has often not been credited and is thus largely invisible. Women have been under-represented in political, cultural or traditional leadership roles due to cultural and social norms. Although their stories are under-represented in written history, Nigeria has a history of female leadership in the liberation struggle and civil-society organizations (Afolabi 2019). This chapter foregrounds their leading role in recent digital citizenship.

Recent years have witnessed a new wave of feminist action and collectivization of women to fight against oppression globally (Molyneux et al. 2021). This comes in response to the gendered nature of exclusions and barriers to active civic participation in Nigeria. Women are increasingly using online spaces including social media to organize, donate, fundraise and finance protests, revealing a shift in civic engagement in Nigeria, with women becoming more active participants (Olaoluwa 2020). This chapter foregrounds the increase in female activism and participation in recent episodes of political contestation through feminist digital citizenship in Nigeria.

There is a relative lack of empirical literature documenting and analysing Nigerian women's digital citizenship. Much of the existing literature on digital citizenship is situated in the Global North (Khazraee and Novak 2018; Roberts and Mohamed Ali 2021). This chapter adds to the existing literature by focusing on the under-researched context of women's digital citizenship in Nigeria and seeks to understand why and how Nigerian women have used digital spaces to make their voices heard through online activism and protest.

The specific question that this chapter seeks to address is what factors restrict *feminist digital citizenship in Nigeria*. The existing literature on digital citizenship in Africa and Nigeria largely focuses on the technological and social inequalities that hinder online civic engagement and participation, at the expense of investigating the experience and practice of citizens as they navigate the use of digital tools for civic participation. This gap in the literature is especially pronounced in Nigerian women's practices of digital citizenship. Highlighting and understanding the actual experiences of different kinds of citizens, based on their different social and economic contexts, gender, race or class, is essential to uncover the shades of social inequality that exist in digital spaces (Oladapo and Ojebode 2021).

I begin by establishing the gendered inequities in access to digital technologies in Nigeria. Not all Nigerian women have access to digital technologies and therefore to digital citizenship. I argue that women's increased access to digital technology, awareness of their rights and higher levels of feminist consciousness and agency are factors contributing to increased digital citizenship. The digital space affords unprecedented opportunities for women's collective action and, to some extent, enables them to transcend existential divides like gender, ethnicity and geographic and socio-economic differences. Feminist digital citizenship can exploit the global virality of internet communication and, in the two case studies featured, compel the government to acknowledge the issues raised – police brutality, nationwide attacks and violence targeted at women and girls – and create systems that tackle the root causes of these issues. Tackling issues of gendered digital exclusions has never been more pertinent and, as online spaces become the new sites for citizen engagement, activism and female organizing, it is essential to understand the issues, gaps, power relations and dynamics to advance women's rights-claiming in Nigeria (Earl and Kimport 2011).

Digital citizenship

A theoretical analysis of citizenship is required for a foundation for the evolution of the concept of digital citizenship and feminist digital citizenship. Roberts (2004) defines citizenship as a substantive ethical and sociological statement, which comprises notions of community, duty and civility. This understanding is grounded in the attainment of rights, from civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights to the right to participation itself. Gaventa (2002) builds on this understanding to argue that citizenship is about the 'right to have rights' and the right to participate in struggles for the creation of new rights. Lister (1997) argues that to be a citizen in the legal and sociological sense means to enjoy the rights of citizenship necessary for agency and social and political participation. Lister (2003) reflects on the need for a feminist understanding of citizenship asserting the need for 'a feminist citizenship project thus encourages an approach to theory and practice that gives due accord to women's agency rather than simply seeing us as victims of discrimination and oppressive male-dominated political, economic and social institutions' (Lister

2003: 6). The literature on African and feminist citizenship has often been concerned both with who is excluded from citizenship and with hybrid and flexible forms of citizenship where ethnicity, gender or religious identities may be central to conceptions of citizenship (Agbalajobi 2010; Madunagu 2008).

Despite debates about definitions and theories of citizenship, there is a broad consensus that citizenship is a concept that involves rights. These rights can be categorized as legal rights, political rights, social rights and participation rights. Therefore, in this chapter, I define citizenship as a process of actively engaging in the civic life of a community or state involving making rights claims (Lister 1998, 2003; Gaventa 2002; Roberts 2004).

The early digital citizenship literature focuses primarily on the technological and social inequalities that hinder civic engagement and participation, rather than the investigation of the experiences of citizens as they navigate the use of digital tools for civic participation. These experiences of citizen agency are typically shaped by societal constraints that structure layers of marginalization and (dis)advantage influenced by the identity of users. Further research is needed on people's experience of digital citizenship to address this gap in the digital citizenship literature. Highlighting and understanding the actual experiences of different kinds of citizens, based on their different social and economic contexts, gender, race, class, will uncover the different layers and shades of social inequalities that exist in digital spaces.

According to Lister (1998), to be a citizen in the legal and sociological sense means to enjoy the rights of citizenship that are necessary for agency and social and political participation. Digital spaces afford a mode of communication that allows the boundaries of the collective to be fluid, flexible and inclusive, and by creating avenues for direct participation and engagement (Kavada 2015). Therefore, digital spaces continue to be useful in collective organizing as they make mass mobilization within social movements (Polletta and Jasper 2001). In support of these spaces, Oyedemi (2015) argues that the concept of human rights, based on fairness, equality and justice, is relevant for the theorization of digital citizenship. By this, he introduces the concept of internet access as a fundamental citizen's right in the literature of digital citizenship.

Not all citizens have access to digital tools and connectivity. Access to technology is uneven between and within countries including along gendered lines in Nigeria. An empirical analysis of patterns of access in any population is necessary to understand how unequal access is structured (Roberts and

Hernandez 2019). Roberts and Hernandez argue that citizens' unequal access to digital technology is enabled or restricted by the five 'A's: availability, affordability, awareness, abilities and agency. These five 'A's are a useful analytic tool for understanding structural barriers to citizens' technology access. The framework allows for reflecting on the issue of technology access through the lens of five key elements:

Availability – to whom is technology connectivity available in this population?

Affordability – who can afford to make use of digital technologies?

Awareness – who is aware of the existence of specific technologies?

Abilities – what digital skills and capabilities exist to enable effective use?

Agency – who has self-efficacy and power within to utilize digital technologies?

The five 'A's are used in this chapter to analyse the disparities that exist in Nigerian women's access to digital technologies for civic participation and feminist action (Figure 5.1).

Five 'A's of Technology Access



Figure 5.1 The five 'A's of technology access. *Source:* Roberts and Hernandez 2019.

Feminist digital citizenship

In this chapter, feminist digital citizenship is defined using cyber-feminist theories. Lister (2003) reflects on the need for a feminist understanding of citizenship, asserting that 'a feminist citizenship project thus encourages an approach to theory and practice that gives due accord to women's agency rather than simply seeing women as victims of discrimination and oppressive male-dominated political, economic, and social institutions' (Lister 2003: 6).

Cyberfeminism is a concept that began in the twentieth century, gathering feminists in the digital space to complement the work being done by feminists in the physical space calling for gender equality (Hall 1996). In the early 1990s, feminists started to organize online under cyberfeminism, bringing more women into a male-dominated space (Pollock and Sutton 1999). In *A Manifesto for Cyborgs*, Donna Haraway (1991) pioneers the idea of cyberfeminism – an alliance between women, machinery and new technology. In her view, cyberfeminism represents the future of feminism, which is the blurring of the boundaries between humans and machines that will eventually make the problematic and binary categories of female and male obsolete.

The foundation of cyberfeminism is the notion that futuristic technology will free its users from the limitations of the physical world, and by this, Haraway means the burden of being forced into identities that mirror social dichotomies of male/female and heterosexual/homosexual. This postmodernist ideology of the computer as a 'liberating utopia' that does not recognize gender, race, or sexuality is what Hall (1996) calls 'liberal cyberfeminism'. This contrasting perspective is grounded in a reality of the computer and new technologies as male-dominant, patriarchal tools and tools of female domination. Hall (1996) introduces the notion of radical cyberfeminism as a movement where women organize to create women-only spaces where participants can collaboratively construct an oppositional gender. Braidotti (2003) explains cyberfeminism as a movement created mainly by postmodern feminists, believing that knowledge is power, and aims to create a collective voice to challenge socially constructed gender norms. They seek to challenge gender norms by redefining gender roles in the digital space through this collective voice. Cyberfeminists use hashtags (#) to organize, raise awareness of gender inequality and mobilize resources to create transitional justice for all who face inequality (Flores et al. 2018).

Digital technologies have affordances that allow feminists to connect across local and transnational networks and build intersectional connections between diverse groups of feminists – essentially de-individualizing the ethos of neoliberalism and allowing new forms of communal organizing (McLean 2018). In this light, Baer (2016) argues that the digital facilitates the co-mingling of individual stories and collective modalities across national and transnational borders, rendering gender oppression visible on a global scale and connecting various feminist movements (Baer 2016: 18). Operating within the hegemony of neoliberalism, Baer asks if digital feminist activism can exist without co-option as a tool of neoliberal political action. Baer is concerned that the potentially toxic nature of the online space can divide as well as enable feminist solidarity (Baer 2016: 18). Boothroyd et al. (2017) are concerned that digital will also be a flourishing ground for counter-feminist ideas and the contradictory possibilities of feminist action pursued, either in part or entirely, in digital spaces.

More recent ideas on feminism in digital spaces contribute to the literature by reiterating that an open digital space is crucial to the production and promotion of dissenting feminist thoughts and action (Mapes 2016; Richardson 2000; Henry et al. 2021). Feminist scholars argue the lack of intersectionality and diversity existing within digital spaces creates versions of feminism that are not representing feminist diversity (Crenshaw 1989; Renfrow 2016). Digital spaces are sites where hosts of complex, nuanced feminist conversations occur. With uneven and unequal access to these sites, the more privileged have access to digital spaces (Van Dijk 2006) and therefore greater authority in debates. Hence, feminism discursively produced online is predominantly representative of these privileged groups that shape feminism more broadly (hooks 2000).

Drawing on the earlier conceptions of agency-based citizenship, rights-claiming digital citizenship and cyberfeminism, in this chapter, to analyse women's digital citizenship in the #BBOG and #ENDSARS campaigns I will use a conceptual framework based on women's agency, digital rights-claiming and cyber-feminist action.

The political context

On 1 October 1960, Nigeria became independent from its former colonist, the UK. The volatile nature of the civic space in Nigeria is rooted in colonization.

Britain's formal decolonisation of Nigeria, which lasted from 1960 to 1963, resulted in the partitioning of the country into three regions (north, west and east), creating division in access to public resources and favouring one region at the expense of the other as the northern region had a slightly higher population than the other two regions combined (Ibezim-Ohaeri 2017). During the period of transition from military rule to democracy, in 1960, political unrest, tensions and violent conflict characterized Nigeria's civic and public space. The period between 1993 and 1999 was characterized by arrest, imprisonment, murder and disappearances of those who spoke against the inhumanity of military rule in the country (Ojebode 2011). The final transition from military to civilian rule took place on 29 May 1999.

At the core of Nigeria's systemic problems is the crisis of governance, which manifests in the declining capacity of the state to cope with a range of internal political and social upheavals. Political elites consistently violate fundamental principles associated with liberal democratic systems – such as competitive elections, the rule of law and political freedom, often exploiting poverty and illiteracy to mobilize voters (Okoi and Iwara 2021). This suggests that Nigeria's political culture rewards incompetent leaders over reform-minded leaders who demonstrate the intellectualism and problem-solving capabilities needed to adequately address systemic issues of poverty and inequality (Elaigwu 2005).

Women's place within the public space

The Nigerian citizenship landscape can hardly be described as gender-inclusive (Agbalajobi 2010, Agbaje 2019). Globally, Nigeria ranks 185 out of 189 countries on the UN Women 'Women in Parliament' index, with 3.34 per cent representation in the lower or single house (2020), putting it among the lowest ten countries for the proportion of women in national parliaments globally (Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) 2020). In the 2019 general elections, women made up only 3.4 per cent of the elected officials in the House of Representatives as well as 7 per cent in the House of Senate post-2019 elections (IPU 2020). The Nigerian Senate's rejection of the Gender and Equal Opportunities Bill (2016) was a setback to the campaign for gender equality in the country (UN Women 2019) Despite these barriers, women have been active contributors to social and economic progress in Nigeria. Courtesy of digital technologies and

voiceless sections of Nigerian society, including women and minority groups, have become empowered to the extent that they can adopt the technologies to amplify their voices. The #BBOG and #ENDSARS protests are women-led online protests that exemplify this increased digital citizenship among women in Nigeria (Feminist Coalition 2020).

The digital civic space in Nigeria

Since the introduction of the internet to Nigeria in 1996, its platform makes for a richer public/civic sphere and for opportunities to construct counter-publics and counter-discourses that shape the national political landscape (Nip 2004; Adomi 2005). In 2022, Nigeria had 105 million internet users. With Nigeria's population being over 261.7 million (World Bank 2022), internet penetration amounted to 51 per cent in 2020 and is set to reach 65.2 per cent in 2025. Several online campaigns against repressive government laws and activities have taken place on these platforms. One example is the #OccupyNigeria hashtag, which trended on Twitter and Facebook in 2012 to mobilize the public against an increase in fuel prices by the government. This chapter focuses on two other examples #BBOG and #ENDSARS (Egbunike 2018). The #NoToSocialMediaBill also trended in 2019 to protest the passing of legislation that sought to criminalize social media use for critical political commentary within the country (Oladapo and Ojebuyi 2017).

In 2019, CIVICUS downgraded the state of Nigeria's civic space from obstructed to repressed – a situation that is uncharacteristic for a democratic administration (CIVICUS 2019). As digital use increases across Nigeria, contestations within these spaces are also increasing. The Nigerian government allegedly uses surveillance technology to track and monitor citizens (Freedom House 2019; Ibezim-Ohaeri 2021; Roberts et al. 2021). On several occasions, the government has shut down access to internet services in multiple places and times (Jacob and Akpan 2015), claiming that these actions are to protect national security (Oladapo and Ojebode 2021). Digital rights in Nigeria are uncertain, as the president is yet to approve the Digital Rights Bill (2019) already passed by the National Assembly (Oladapo and Ojebode 2021) On 5 June 2021 the government implemented a nationwide shutdown of the social media platform Twitter after the platform deleted threatening tweets made

by Nigeria's president Muhammadu Buhari. According to the Minister of Communications, the government's action was based on the 'litaney of issues of misinformation and fake news caused by the social media platform in Nigeria' (BBC 2021).

The Bring Back Our Girls protests (#BBOG)

The #BBOG movement erupted in April 2014 following the abduction of 276 schoolgirls from Chibok Secondary School, north-east Nigeria, by the Boko Haram Islamist insurgency group. The organization opposes the Westernization of Nigerian society, which it claims is the cause of corruption and demands the formation of an Islamic state in Nigeria as the panacea (Akinola and Tell 2013). The kidnap of the 276 Chibok girls while in school was a statement of the group's grievances against Western education for women (Oriola 2017).

The objective of #BBOG was to put pressure on the government to rescue the abductees and prosecute the responsible group. Infuriated by the government's slow response to this gendered security challenge, the group organized a public protest on 30 April 2014 in Nigeria's capital, Abuja. Led by former minister Oby Ezekwesili, protests were held on the streets, on social media and even spread around the world, calling on the Nigerian government to take the necessary actions to secure the girls' release. The hashtags #BringBackOurGirls and #BBOG were used as a form of online activism and went viral on Twitter trending globally by May (BBC News 2014). Oby Ezekwesili and Aisha Yesufu have been described as co-founders and leaders of the movement (Uwazuruike 2021). The movement has yielded the return of more than 100 girls and extended its concern to include demands for good governance and advocacy for security concerns and kidnapping in Nigeria (Ojebode and Oladapo 2018). The movement, being women-led, represents a remarkable event in Nigeria, legitimizing women's active role in civic matters.

The #ENDSARS protests

#ENDSARS was a series of mass protests against police brutality in Nigeria. The protest takes its name from the hashtag started in 2017 as a Twitter

campaign to demand the disbanding of the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) unit of the Nigerian Police Force (Ojedokun et al. 2021). SARS was a branch that came under the State Criminal Investigation and Intelligence Department (SCIID) established in late 1992 to detain, investigate and prosecute people involved in cybercrimes, armed robbery, fraud and kidnapping (Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project 2021). The squad had been accused of several human rights violations, illegal ‘stop and searches’, illegal arrests and detentions, extrajudicial killings, sexual harassment of women, and brutalizing of young male Nigerians (Aluko 2021). In 2017, Nigerian youth took to the streets in a peaceful protest to spread awareness of SARS brutality, demanding that the unit be disbanded. The protests also moved to social media using the hashtag #ENDSARS (Ekoh and George 2021).

On 20 October 2020, video evidence emerged on social media showing the Nigerian police and army opening fire on unarmed protesters at Lekki Tollgate. It was alleged that the Nigerian army was sent by the government to repress the peaceful protest, which resulted in the death of twelve civilians (Olaoluwa 2020). The Nigerian government was also accused of arresting protesters, freezing the bank accounts of those identified as leaders of the protest and fining news agencies that reported the alleged shooting (Amnesty International 2020). #ENDSARS protests were staged internationally across Europe, the United States and major cities in Africa. Women also played a key role in these protests, such as Aisha Yesufu, the co-convener of the Bring Back Our Girls movement. A picture of Aisha protesting (wearing a hijab) soon became the iconic symbol for the movement (BBC 2020).

Barriers to technology access in Nigeria

If digital citizenship is understood as civic engagement via digital tools and in digital spaces, then understanding people’s ability to access and use those digital tools and spaces is pertinent. Technology access or exclusion is central to understanding the factors that explain women’s level of digital citizenship in Nigeria in the case of #ENDSARS and #BBOG. This chapter adopts Roberts and Hernandez’s (2019) framework, the five ‘A’s of technology access – availability, affordability, awareness, abilities and agency – to understand

Nigerian women's ability to engage in digital citizenship. Four of the five categories were found to be particularly relevant to the study context.

Availability

Mobile and internet connectivity is not available in many rural areas of the country, acting as a substantial barrier to digital citizenship for millions of Nigerians. Access to internet connectivity remains unevenly distributed. Digital connectivity is unavailable in most rural communities of Borno, Jigawa Zamfara and Yobe in north-east Nigeria, where millions of citizens do not have electricity, cellular coverage or internet connection. These availability challenges often reflect and accentuate existing patterns of socio-economic (dis)advantage. Broadband internet connections and the fastest cellular connections are mainly found in relatively prosperous metropolitan areas such as Lagos, Abuja, Port Harcourt and Kano. Women, especially rural women, are often the least connected (Adomi 2005; Carboni et al. 2021).

Availability is unpredictable and intermittent, fluctuating as the power supply cuts in and out or as cellular coverage fluctuates. In my opinion, even when a citizen lives in an area where the internet is normally available, questions of reliability and quality remain. Consequently, this broadens the divide as it creates inequitable implications for civic participation as only certain sectors and classes of society have access to this privilege. Ahiakwo (2001) identified the main barriers to internet connectivity in Nigeria as a lack of adequate telecommunication infrastructure and poverty levels. However, in recent years, private sector investment has increased internet access and availability. Although some parts of the country still lack access and availability, increasing numbers of citizens are now able to access digital platforms.

Affordability

Even in areas where connectivity is available, many people cannot afford to access the internet. This is due to the high cost of the internet, lack of infrastructure like electricity and internet cafes are expensive to use. Broadband affordability in Nigeria has improved over time as a result of competition between service providers (Nigerian National Broadband Plan 2020). Nigeria ranks twenty-eighth (out of ninety-nine countries surveyed) on the 2019

Affordability Drivers Index (ADI). High-income disparity, persistent inflation and high unemployment make mobile internet connectivity unaffordable for most Nigerians. The situation is worse for women, who typically have less disposable income due to prevailing gender inequalities, which particularly affect women in rural areas (Adeosun and Owolabi 2021).

Abilities

The lack of digital skills can limit a person's ability to translate digital connectivity into active digital citizenship even when issues of availability, affordability and awareness have been addressed. There is a large gender gap in digital literacy in Nigeria (Carboni et al. 2021). As gender norms lead to the under-representation of women and girls in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM), gender-inclusive programming may need to pay particular attention to the training needs of women and girls (UN 2011). Over recent years, there has been increased digital literacy training for girls in Nigeria by civil-society organizations. However, these initiatives are concentrated in urban areas (especially Lagos) where digital technologies are more readily available. As a result, women who have access to these initiatives tend to be those with a certain level of education, social status and class, while rural women remain excluded from these opportunities. Not all women are equally (dis)advantaged. However, women who do gain digital skills become empowered as a result, using those skills to access knowledge and information for civic participation (Adomi 2005).

Agency

Even when digital technologies are available and affordable, and women have the necessary awareness and abilities to make effective use of them, a lack of agency can still prevent women from engaging in digital citizenship (Archibong et al. 2021). With the presence of patriarchal social norms and cultures, gender discriminatory laws and policies, which persist in Nigerian society, women's agency is often limited. A large part of Nigerian tradition has subjugated women to the role of the caregiver (Oluyemi 2015). Even today, for many communities and individuals, a woman's 'place' is considered to be at home. All their lives, women are told they do not belong in civic

spaces and that their voices do not matter. The continuous perpetuation of women in this light has reinforced a position of inferiority. The effect of this marginalization has led women to internalize feelings of inferiority and low self-esteem (Chuku 2009). However, emerging women-led activism and large-scale protests against injustice in the digital space are proof that this trend is changing. Feminist ideologies have progressed in Nigeria (Zukas 2009) and even more with digital. And as more women have access to education, knowledge and information, this leads to increased empowerment, opportunities and agency.

#BBOG protest – A claim for citizenship rights

Active citizenship is described as the claiming of rights and participation in civil, political, economic, social and cultural aspects of society (Lister 1998, Jones and Gaventa 2004, Roberts 2004). The determinants of access to as well as the nature and quality of participation within the public and civic spheres are often important definers of the experiences and citizenship participation of marginalized groups (McLean 2019). For the #BBOG protest, the rights claim was simple: a demand for the safe return of the abducted girls to their families. The protesters were advocating for their right to safety and justice for the girls' families. Having been denied justice for the loss and kidnap of their daughters when complaining in traditional civic spaces, the #BBOG protesters began expressing their citizenship on social media, most notably on Twitter. The interest of the Chibok girls and their families was not sufficiently prioritized by the government. The historical inability of Nigeria's government to provide basic security or effective services triggered anger and distrust that the government would do anything about the Chibok kidnap (Ragozzino 2021). The participants displayed an awareness of their basic rights as citizens and used their agency to hold the government accountable, making rights claims that meet the definition of citizenship as rights-claiming and agency-based (Lister 1998; Gaventa 2002). It also reveals an awareness of the capability of digital media and technologies for virality, to force the government to pay attention to their needs. The use of social media amplified the reach of the campaigners and enabled them to secure solidarity from millions of Nigerians and supporters from around the world.

Through the protests, the aggrieved families and their allies exerted their digital citizenship to claim rights in a situation where some felt powerless to influence domestic politics, drawing international attention to a situation that reflected patriarchal innuendos in the civic space, which was male-dominated and not in favour of the women in question proven by the government's slow response to the situation and their inability to successfully negotiate the release of the Chibok girls. A space has been predominantly male-dominated, and women have no voice or agency to make their demands heard until digital tools enable them to mobilize millions of supporters around the world.

#ENDSARS

In the case of #ENDSARS, we see the same trend of marginalization and defiance of the rights of a section of society manifested by the lackadaisical and nonchalant point that the government was non-responsive to citizens in both cases (until they used digital tools to grow their support and lend weight to their rights-claiming). In this case, the aggrieved group was young people who were victims of police brutalization by SARS and who decided to hold protests to fight for a better Nigeria. Nigeria's high inflation rates, security challenges, rising unemployment rates, ineffective governance and government distrust, combined with the large youth population, triggered the protests, with those involved claiming their rights to security and freedom of movement. Phrases like 'Stop Killing Us' were consistently posted on social media.

The pent-up rage of many of the country's youth and women over unfair profiling and harassment by SARS found an outlet in these protests, which started with no defined or central leadership. The protesters' demands at the beginning were for the government to abolish SARS, provide justice to victims of police brutality and reform the police. However, their demands widened, premised on the pervasive failure of the government to deliver equitable economic prosperity for citizens, which enraged youth in particular.

The protests evolved from a single focus on the abuses perpetrated by the SARS unit to claiming rights to employment opportunities, political participation for youth and women, economic development and good governance. The slogan of the protest became *Soro Soke*, which in Yoruba means 'Speak Up'. Soon, the message of the #ENDSARS protest became that

young Nigerians wanted to speak up against inequality, corrupt practices by elite government officials that perpetually act against citizens' interests, to take back their country from the entrenched political order that they believe has not served their interests. Against this background, the #ENDSARS protests have become a symbol of broader resentment and opened the path for marginalized Nigerian youths to vent pent-up grievances against the government, starting with the excesses of SARS, which the government has failed to address after several promises of reform. This is a valid display of citizenship, in line with our framing of the term as agency-based actions for the claiming and recognition of human rights (Lister 1998; Gaventa 2002).

Alternative safe space for women

Women's contributions to Nigeria's history have been written out of history. Nigerian women have always played a major role in all social and economic activities (Adeosun and Owolabi 2021). There is evidence of the political influence of women dating back to the precolonial era. From the Borno women, who occupied important administrative positions in the royal family in the precolonial era, to Queen Bakwa Turk, who founded the Modern Zaria, the contributions of women in Nigeria's political history can also be found in the Aba women's riot of 1929 against colonial repression (Zukas 2009) during which at least fifty women were killed. Even though some narratives maintain that these women were violent and unlawful, they were merely fighting against the oppression imposed on them by colonialism (Adeosun and Owolabi 2021).

Young women in Nigeria represent a group that is even more marginalized in their access to top political leadership and participation based on their gender and age. The patriarchal nature of the Nigerian political arena is dominated by middle-aged and old men, predominantly from the northern parts of the country (Abah and Okwori 2009: 27).

Reflecting on the messaging of both #ENDSARS and #BBOG is useful in analysing women's agency and power in these situations. The most frequent theme comes from the grievances relating to the denial of rights and freedoms. The lack of rights to security and safety in the Nigerian public space limits citizens' ability to engage in democratic processes, which the presence of safe public spaces fosters. This shrinking of civic space offline created the need to

create civic space online (Roberts and Mohamed Ali 2021). By moving online, activists created a safer realm of expression for women, which explains women increased civic participation in the digital space. This notion is in line with the framing of cyberfeminism as a creation of alternative safe spaces for women in cyberspace where they can collectively advocate for the issues that concern them (Haraway 1991).

Increased feminist consciousness

Over the last fifty years, there has been increased feminist consciousness among women in Nigeria. This is evidenced by the evolution of the feminist community and feminist organizations in Nigeria. The oldest and largest women's movement in Nigeria is the National Council of Women's Societies (NCWS), founded in early 1958 (Madunagu 2008). According to Basu's (1995) statement of the NCWS:

an unarmed movement, that is non-confrontational. It is a movement for the progressive upliftment of women for motherhood, nationhood, and development. This movement is 'at home' with the protection of our culture and tradition as well as with the supremacy of men. It will not rock the boat. (Madunagu 2008)

This reveals that the feminist movement in Nigeria evolved from being complacent to becoming more radical, consistent and organized, with clear objectives and ideology as we can see in recent times. The first national feminist movement was inaugurated in 1982, at a national conference held at Ahmadu Bello University. It came into being with the inauguration, in 1983, of the organization Women in Nigeria (WIN) following the 1982 national conference on the same theme (Madunagu 2008). The papers presented at this event indicate a growing awareness by Nigeria's university-educated women that the place of women in society required a concerted effort and a place on the national agenda: the public perception (Madunagu 2008). WIN achieved many successes and established the groundwork for feminist activism in Nigeria. Nigerian feminists along with various institutions have been at the forefront of influencing the state to annul policies that are against the interest of women. The increased female education and political participation of

women, abolishment of female genital mutilation and reproductive healthcare for women were the successes of the feminist movement in Nigeria. Over the years, more women-centred NGOs have taken up women's issues.

In the #BBOG and #ENDSARS campaigns, one of the main themes is the notion of agency and feminist consciousness – that women are in charge of their destiny and have to believe this as a precondition for any change in their situation. However, it is difficult to say that these protests themselves sparked increased feminist consciousness, as most of those who joined in the protests were women and people who had personal stakes in the outcomes: including victims' families, an abductee's relative, owner of a threatened roadside business or residents of a neighbourhood marked for demolition (Ojebode 2018). Through the #ENDSARS protest being predominantly led by women, we see the female participants comfortable with protesting online and offline, regardless of security issues.

Mass mobilization for collective action

The #ENDSARS movement mobilized one of the world's largest Black youth populations to protest against government oppression. The Feminist Coalition – a women-led NGO campaigning for gender equality in Nigeria – played an instrumental role in sustaining the protest, and over the course of the protest, they raised over eighty million naira through crowdfunding towards supporting the protest with food, legal and medical aid (Okunola 2021). Even after the protests ended, they continued to cover legal and health costs. Women of the Nigerian feminist coalition were at the forefront of the negotiations with the government, and media postings of the protest published comprehensive documentation of how the donations were spent (Feminist Coalition 2021). Their level of organization, accountability and the urgency with which they delivered real-time security updates for participants are evidence of the impact of mass collectivization, leadership and action, which took the form of multiple councils, meetings and contributions towards making a difference based on feminist values and ideologies.

Reflecting on the above and the entire movement reveals that in Nigeria, with its history and root problems of gender discrimination and ethno-religious divides, the #ENDSARS movement proved women's willingness to

exercise agency and citizenship rights, and this time leveraging the power of social media and digital tools to collectivize in an organized united front and successfully garnering global attention. This reveals the expression of the thirst for active citizenship engagements by a group that had been marginalized by egocentric and incompetent leadership, revealing a working nation and, more importantly, the change that young people in Nigeria are demanding.

Conclusion

This chapter set out to analyse women's access to digital technologies in Nigeria and how they have used it for feminist action and citizenship rights. I explored the issues restricting women's digital citizenship using case studies #BBOG to #ENDSARS through a unique conceptual framework combining elements of the five 'A's, digital citizenship and cyberfeminism. The research showed that factors explaining women's increased digital citizenship included increased access to technology, increased rights violations and the safety of online spaces enabling more visible, feminist agency. The digital space afforded the power to voices that were unable to secure government action in the offline public sphere. The opening up of digital spaces allowed Nigerian feminists to use social networks, including sites like Facebook and Twitter to organize impactful protests and campaigns against injustices.

The five 'A's proved to be useful analytically in showing how increased (but uneven) access to digital technologies advantaged some groups but left others behind. The digital citizenship lens proved useful analytically to show how these spaces were used for agency-based rights-claiming to demand responsive government and social justice. Finally, the cyberfeminism lens improved the analysis by showing how the safety of online spaces compared to male-dominant offline spaces enabled a new brand of digital feminist agency to emerge as experienced in the leadership of the #BBOG and #ENDSARS campaigns. These campaigns were qualitatively different from and significantly more successful than the offline patriarchal demonstrations that preceded them and failed to secure government action. I argue that none of these analytical elements alone could have produced this analysis in isolation and that it was only by combining all three that a comprehensive analysis was possible.

Agency is a recurrent theme across the analysis of the case studies foregrounded by the analytical framework of technology access, digital citizenship and cyberfeminism. There exists a sense of growing sense of citizen agency, which leads to positive collective action to claim rights and change people's social circumstances. This growing practice of citizenship and digital citizenship takes the form of offline and online protests that avoid the ethnic and gender divisions that weaken other social movements.

Arising from this analysis, the following recommendations for policy, practice and further research emerge. The government of Nigeria needs to ensure that all citizens have equal and unrestricted access to civic space and are free to air their grievances without the need to resort to violence. More specifically, women's issues need to be recognized and women's voices should be heard. Moving forward, access to and participation in digital citizenship should be recognized as part of the broader issues of civil rights and gender equality in society, and this should be reflected in policymaking processes across all levels of government.

Much research has explored the shrinking of civic space in contested settings like Nigeria (Roberts 2021). However, we can see that even as the civic space is shrinking, citizens make creative use of digital tools and spaces to claim rights and express citizenship. Civic space is not just shrinking but dynamically changing. Further research is needed to document and analyse the changing dynamics of digital civic spaces and what that means for people who have less and less access to digital technologies. Gender access gaps must be bridged to ensure that all citizens have unrestricted access to digital citizenship.

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